



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
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Testimony before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

Monday, March 16, 2009

9:30 AM in Room 2B of the LOB

Good morning/afternoon, Chairpersons and members of the General Elections and Administration Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis the Executive Director of the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC) a non-partisan state agency. This Commission represents a voice for the African-American community and accomplishes its mission primarily through research, policy analysis, advocacy and outreach. I am speaking in opposition to

House Bill (HB) – 6375 *An act concerning review and termination of certain Boards and Commissions*

and

Senate Bill (SB) – 840 *An act concerning the elimination of the office of consumer counsel, the office of healthcare advocate, the office of ombudsman for property rights and certain legislative Commissions*

We recognize the harsh times this state is facing, the economic uncertainty and difficulty in balancing a state budget with limited resources, yet we also realize that disparities in educational achievement, access to affordable health care, housing, economic opportunities, environmental justice persist and are prevalent particularly in the African-American community. Education has remained a top priority for this Commission for many reasons. Firstly the Commission realizes that there continue to be sharp differences in student academic achievement between African-Americans and non-minority groups. Efforts have been made but have not been successful in closing the achievement gap in any significant way. Results from the Connecticut Mastery Tests and the Connecticut Academic Performance Tests continue to show African-Americans falling below the state average in Math, Reading and Writing. More importantly we realize that there is a strong correlation between lack of education and juvenile delinquency. Education opens up opportunities for youth if not setting them along career paths at least instilling the discipline they need to become mature adults, unfortunately the statistics show a disturbing trend. School expulsion rates are 4 times higher for African-Americans than their white counterparts. African-American males make up roughly 30 percent of the juvenile justice population and there are more African-American males incarcerated in Connecticut jails both in juvenile and adult facilities.¹ The issue of education is just not another problem facing the African-American community but rather a fundamental civil rights issue that must be dealt with urgently.

Overall in terms of the economy the unemployment rates for all racial/ethnic groups has worsened but for African-Americans joblessness has consistently surpassed the state average for at least the last three years. In 2008 the unemployment rate in our state was 5.7 percent, whereas the rate for African-Americans was 12.8 percent.² This is just a snapshot of the conditions facing this population segment. We wish that we did not need any legislation for various

¹ Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Educational Equity, *Expulsion and Suspension Rates*

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *State Unemployment Rates*

groups in our state and indeed but until certain trends are reversed these Commissions must remain in their original form.

This Commission serves in a myriad of ways to address these socio-economic disparities. While there are other equally important state agencies, coalitions, advocacy groups and partners etc. involved in advocacy that benefit the African-Americans this Commission has a special and trusting bond with the community it serves. Firstly we serve as a watchdog agency by monitoring, influencing and shaping policy that impacts African-Americans across the state. Secondly we serve in the unique role of being a bridge between the legislature and the community by presenting issues from diverse group of constituents to the state legislature. Thirdly we serve as a vital resource for residents searching for information on matters pertaining to employment, housing, predatory lending etc. The Commission researches, collects and directs the public to the appropriate sources for assistance.

Much has been accomplished since the creation of this Commission, with obviously more challenges ahead. While we recognize that there is no such thing as a perfect organization we respect and understand that there need to be processes in place to assess the effectiveness and usefulness of any organization. To this end the AAAC as the other Commissions have is working with the Appropriations Sub-Committee on its Results Based Accountability (RBA) model. This model seeks to enhance the strengths of all the Commissions. It identifies opportunities that must be seized and shortcomings if any that must be addressed. This model allows us to strengthen our mission and obligation to the African-American community for even better outcomes. We have embraced it fully. In view of this any action to eliminate, consolidate or etc. is counter productive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.